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Homeowners contribute 'sweat equity' on path to ownership

Fort Riley family participates in program to help build their own home, lower their mortgage

By Mike Heronemus

Editor

A Fort Riley military family joined five other local families Nov. 18 to receive the keys to their new homes in Junction City. It was the first military family to participate in the special home ownership program.

Spc. Alper Kontente of the 601st Aviation Support Battalion and his daughter attended the ceremony on East 16th Street, where the family will eventually live.

'Sweat equity' pays off

The six families recently completed eight months of work on their homes in the self-help program that gives families a chance for affordable mortgages if they contribute "sweat equity" to build their homes.

Families must work 25 to 35 hours a week for eight months to finish all six houses, explained Todd Fike, the program's director.

In exchange for the "sweat equity," the families will own homes valued at about \$120,000 with a mortgage of about \$90,000, Fike said.

The work family members do includes everything except the licensed work, such as electricity and plumbing, Fike explained. The current group of families poured concrete, framed the hous-

es, put up walls and sheet rock and put on siding and roof shingles, he said.

The Kontentes' home includes wall-to-wall carpeting, four bedrooms, two baths, a combination kitchen, dining area and living room and finished two-car garage. The lawn has been seeded and one tree has been planted in the front yard.

Their home sits in a neighborhood of about 20 homes built through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Mutual Self-Help Housing Program.

Program builds neighborhoods

Junction City has helped 35 families build new homes using that program, Fike said. Work on another six in the Kontentes' neighborhood already is under way.

The program is important, said USDARD Kansas Director Chuck Banks, because it helps families improve their living standard and "it builds neighborhoods."

Fike commented before the ribbon-cutting ceremony officially turning over the homes to their new owners that he could see many of the neighbors who already had moved into their homes among people in the crowd.



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Post/Heronemus

Six-year-old Athena Brown prepares to cut the ribbon officially opening her family's new home and five others in the Junction City Self-Help Housing program. Helping Athena are Todd Fike, program director, and Dan Pfizenmaier, the program's on-site supervisor. Fort Riley Soldier Al Contente (second from right) was among the family representatives accepting the keys to their new homes. The Contentes are the first military family to participate in the self-help program.

Want info?

For information about the self-help housing program and how to qualify, visit the program office in the basement of the Junction City Municipal Building, 700 Jefferson St., or call 238-3103, extension 142.